

Saquish, Gurnet access denied

By John O'Keefe
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PLYMOUTH — The selectmen have decided not to allow public access to Saquish Head and Gurnet Point, effectively ending years of squabbling between privacy-minded homeowners and public-access advocates.

At issue is whether Plymouth residents have a right to use the roads and beaches in the remote peninsula neighborhoods because the town owns several small parcels of land there.

Members of the Saquish-Gurnet Neighborhood Association have argued that they are entitled to control access because they own and maintain the dirt roads throughout the peninsula. Every summer, the group posts a guard at the entrance to Gurnet Point to stop uninvited visitors from entering.

On the other side of the issue is a small but vocal group of Plymouth residents who argue that they should be able to use the beaches adjacent to town-owned lots, most of which are no bigger than one-tenth of an acre.

Selectmen envision public-use problems

Although lawyers say Plymouth officials could issue permits allowing residents to use the publicly owned beachfront parcels, the selectmen decided that it would be too difficult to manage and would pose liability risks.

"The parcels of town-owned land certainly are not conducive to public use," Selectman David Malaguti said last night. "I think we're using common sense by saying the land is virtually inaccessible."

The only way to reach the neighborhoods is by boat or by driving across Duxbury Beach. With a four-wheel-drive vehicle, it takes at least an hour to get from Powder Point Bridge in Duxbury to the end of Saquiah Point.

Selectman David Rushforth agreed with Malaguti. He said the truck he was in got stuck in the sand when he toured the peninsula with Police Chief Robert Pomeroy.

"It is pretty, but it's muddy," he said. "It's certainly not a place where you'd bring your family and spend the afternoon. As much as I would like to stand up for taxpayer rights, it doesn't make sense to me."

But Selectman Linda Teagan, who toured the parcels with Rushforth and Pomeroy, said the town should provide access to any publicly owned beaches. She called Saquish "one of the most beautiful stretches of beach in our community."

"You have to be careful when you limit the rights of taxpayers and citizens to access these areas," she said.

Teagan suggested that the town devise a way to distribute beach stickers for the town-owned parcels. Officials said the largest parcel could hold about 10 vehicles at once. Teagan's motion failed, 4-1.

Joseph Chromy, a West Plymouth resident who fishes in Gurnet and Saquish clambeds, told the selectmen that the public has a right to visit historic Gurnet Light, which is owned and operated by the U.S. Coast Guard.

The town's attorney said she was not sure whether federal laws include such a guarantee.